

Provençal Vegetable Soup (Soupe au Pistou)

Soupe au Pistou is a classic French dish; it's popular in summer and early fall when fresh shell beans and bunches of basil make their way into the markets. As with any regional dish it has variations: some cooks add pasta as well as beans to the soup, some add the pistou (similar to Italian pesto) directly to the soup, some use water for the liquid, others use white chicken stock. I have taken components of several recipes and combined them to make my own version of Soupe au Pistou. Fresh with the flavors of tender young green beans, zucchini, peas, carrots, and leeks. The pistou adds the umami, (savory flavour). There is no cheese or nuts in my version of pistou. I add a variety of beans, French green, scarlet runners, fresh from the garden along with dried or canned, white, kidney or borlotti or a mixture of several. They make the soup a little more substantial.



(serves 4 to 6)

Soup

9 oz. cooked white beans (navy beans are good here soaked overnight) or one can drained.

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 diced onion

2 cloves crushed garlic

1 celery stalk

3 diced carrots

4 diced potato

1/2 cup diced leek

6 cups water or white chicken stock

3 tomatoes

4 diced zucchini

1/2 cup each fresh green beans and scarlet runners

a small handful of peas (thawed if frozen)

1 tbsp. herbes de provence (or mixture of thyme and other fresh herbs)

a small bay leaf

kosher salt

freshly ground white pepper

Pistou

2 cloves of garlic, peeled and chopped
2 small bunches fresh basil, or a combination of basil and mint leaves, rinsed (a little less than an ounce altogether)
3 to 4 tablespoons olive oil
kosher salt

While the soup is simmering, make the pistou. In a small food processor mix the garlic, basil leaves, and a little salt. Process until coarsely chopped, then stream in the olive oil and blend well. Ladle the hot soup into bowls and swirl a teaspoon or two of the pistou atop the soup.

Directions

Heat the olive oil over medium heat in a 4 quart, heavy saucepan or Dutch oven. Add the onion, garlic and leeks with a good pinch of salt, and sweat the vegetables for about 5 minutes. Add the celery, carrots and leeks along with the herbes de Provence, bay leaf, and another pinch of salt and cook another 5 minutes. (do not brown)
Next add the potato, green peas, and stock and simmer gently for about 10 to 15 minutes.

Add the peeled and chopped tomatoes, discarding the tough core.

Next add the fresh beans and the zucchini, peas and vermicelli and cook an additional 10 minutes until veggies are tender but not mushy. If adding frozen peas wait until the end.

Top each bowl with the pistou.